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FM AMEMBASSY GABORONE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7422
INFO SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L GABORONE 003732

E.O. 12958: DECL: (12/3/2006)

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SUBJECT: MOGAE ON MUGABE: HE WILL STAY IN POWER "BY
HOOK OR BY CROOK"

REF: GABORONE 3681

(U) CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR JOHN E. LANGE FOR REASONS
1.5 (B AND D).

11. (C) PRESIDENT FESTUS MOGAE (PROTECT) BELIEVES THERE IS NO CHANCE TO INFLUENCE ZIMBABWEAN PRESIDENT ROBERT MUGABE TO HOLD FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS BY MARCH. HE SAID MUGABE IS ACTING LIKE A "WOUNDED BUFFALO" AND IT WOULD BE BETTER TO HAVE THE ELECTIONS SOONER RATHER THAN LATER TO LESSEN THE HARM THAT IS BEING DONE.

12. (C) THE AMBASSADOR RAISED THE ISSUE OF ZIMBABWE DURING A 12/1 DINNER AT WHICH MAURICE TEMPELSMAN AND THE HARVARD AIDS INSTITUTE BESTOWED THEIR 2001 AIDS LEADERSHIP AWARD ON MOGAE. MOGAE AVERTED THAT MUGABE DOES NOT CARE WHAT ANY OUTSIDERS THINK AND WILL STAY IN POWER "BY HOOK OR BY CROOK." IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THERE WOULD BE FURTHER SADC ENGAGEMENT WITH MUGABE AND HIS GOVERNMENT PRIOR TO THE MARCH ELECTIONS, MOGAE SAID THERE PROBABLY WOULD BE MEETINGS BUT HE SAW NO CHANCE OF SUCCESS. IN PAST SADC DISCUSSIONS ON ZIMBABWE, HE SAID HE HAD LED THE DISCUSSION OF ECONOMIC CONCERNS AND WAS THEN FOLLOWED BY PRESIDENT MBEKI. NOW, HE SAID (ONLY HALF-JOKINGLY) THAT THE ONLY WAY TO REMOVE MUGABE FROM POWER WOULD BE TO ATTACK MILITARILY AND REMOVE HIM FORCEFULLY. THE AMBASSADOR DESCRIBED A SCENARIO IN WHICH MUGABE AND ZANU-PF WERE SO UNPOPULAR THAT THEY WOULD ACTUALLY LOSE THE ELECTIONS DESPITE ALL OF THE VIOLENCE AND INTIMIDATION IN ADVANCE. MOGAE RESPONDED THAT MUGABE IS VERY SMART AND IS ALREADY WORKING TO PREVENT THAT POSSIBILITY, INCLUDING THROUGH HIS LATEST EFFORT TO DISENFRANCHISE THOSE ZIMBABWEANS LIVING ABROAD.

13. (C) THE CONVERSATION THEN TURNED TO THE IMPACT ON SOUTHERN AFRICA AND THE CONTINENT AS A WHOLE. THE AMBASSADOR NOTED THAT THE CREDIBILITY OF NEPAD, WHICH EMPHASIZES AFRICA'S RESPONSIBILITY FOR GOOD GOVERNANCE, COULD BE UNDERCUT IF THE ELECTIONS WERE STOLEN. MOGAE DISMISSED THE IMPORTANCE OF NEPAD, WHICH HE VIEWS AS BROAD RHETORIC HAVING LITTLE REAL IMPACT ON THE GROUND. HE SAID THE COB HAS GONE ALONG WITH THE PROGRAM BECAUSE IT AGREES WITH THE GOALS BUT AT THE SAME TIME IT HAS LOW EXPECTATIONS FOR IT.

14. (C) THE AMBASSADOR ASKED MOGAE IF HE FORESAW STRONG MEASURES BY SADC, POSSIBLY EVEN INCLUDING EXPULSION, SHOULD THE ELECTIONS TURN OUT AS BADLY AS MANY PREDICT. MOGAE WAS UNCERTAIN ABOUT SADC PROCEDURES IN SUCH A CASE BUT ADDED THAT ZIMBABWE'S "APOLOGISTS" (UNNAMED) WOULD ARGUE THAT THE SITUATIONS IN SADC MEMBER STATES ANGOLA AND THE DRC WERE SUCH THAT ZIMBABWE DID NOT MERIT BEING SINGLED OUT FOR EXPULSION FROM THE ORGANIZATION.

15. (C) COMMENT. MOGAE'S VIEWS ARE CONSISTENT WITH THE PESSIMISM EXPRESSED TO US EARLIER BY FOREIGN MINISTER MERAFHE (REFTEL). MOGAE BRIDLES AT THE MEMORY OF BEING BERATED BY THE "WAR VETERANS" DURING THE SADC TASK FORCE VISIT TO ZIMBABWE ON SEPTEMBER 9. DESPITE OUR EFFORTS TO ENCOURAGE CONTINUED ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT, THE COB NOW SEEMS TO HAVE GIVEN UP ON THE PROSPECTS OF INFLUENCING MUGABE.

LANGE